

CURIOSITIES OF THE LAKE

WALT QUADER

Lower Burrell, Pennsylvania

There's a curious dieseling "SAMUEL SAMUEL CLEMENS SAMUEL CLEMENS CLEMENS" sequence in Mark Twain's *Roughing It*, in the 'Curiosities of the Lake' story, in the passage:

There are no fish in Mono Lake--no frogs, no snakes, no polliwogs --nothing, in fact, that goes to make life desirable. Millions of wild ducks and sea-gulls swim about the surface, but no living thing exists under the surface, except a white feathery sort of worm, one half an inch long, which looks like a bit of white thread frayed out at the sides. If you dip up a gallon of water, you will get about fifteen thousand of these. They give to the water a sort of grayish-white appearance. Then there is a fly, which looks something like our house fly. These settle on the beach to eat the worms that wash ashore--and any time, you can see there a belt of flies an inch deep and six feet wide, and this belt extends clear around the lake--a belt of flies one hundred miles long. If you throw a stone among them, they swarm up so thick that they look dense, like a cloud. You can hold them under water as long as you please--they do not mind it--they are only proud of it. When you let them go, they pop up to the surface as dry as a patent office report, and walk off as unconcernedly as if they had been educated especially with a view to affording instructive entertainment to man in that particular way. Providence leaves nothing to go by chance. All things have their uses and their part and proper place in Nature's economy: the ducks eat the flies--the flies eat the worms--the Indians eat all three--the wild cats eat the Indians--the white folks eat the wild cats--and thus all things are lovely.

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The rhythm of the sound of “SAMUEL SAMUEL CLEMENS SAMUEL CLEMENS CLEMENS” brings to mind the time I switched-off a 1951 Buick for my mechanic. It shuddered and coughed and wheezed and rattled. “*Engine’s got black– black lung! black lung, lung!*” she guffawed.

I rolled my eyes.